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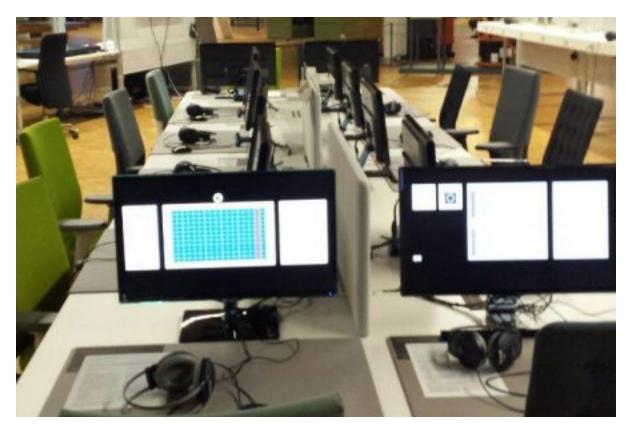
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RADICAL INDIFFERENCE

MASHINES   BAUDRILLARD, DATA, DIFFERENCE, INDIFFERENCE, TECH-KAPITAL

The behavioral and reception patterns of the masses today consist mostly of repetitive habits, whereby they, as users on the Internet, by no means remain passive, but rather constantly involve themselves in the pseudo-turbulent events via the social networks in order to assiduously produce data and information in conformity with employment, sometimes also in a racist manner, which the large media corporations such as Google, Apple, or Facebook extract, quantify, and exploit. In the process, a new logic of accumulation has emerged within which surveillance capital extracts data about human behavior including seemingly useless surpluses of data

(errors, syntax, signs, etc.), that is, sucks up data and errors and constantly combines them with other data to feed intelligent machines that use algorithmic processes to produce predictions about users' future behavior, predictions that are then offered and sold as quasi-derivatives on behavioral futures markets. (Zuboff) In doing so, surveillance capital extracts predictive value not just from the content a user posts, but even from the exclamation points and commas they do or do not place, or, to put it another way, not from where someone goes, but how someone goes. Users might remain the owners of those data they give to the surveillance capitalists, but they definitely do not get access to the surplus of the data. Katharina Pistor has objected at this point to the notion of market that a)it is about a unilateral, mouse-click action that (apart from personal data) does not require the consent of the data producer, b) the surveillance capitalists do not realize the price of data by by selling the predictive power of the data, and c) the price of data is determined by the processing and analytical capacity of the surveillance capital, a capacity that depends on the amount of data already collected and the control over access to the data. Here, the data economy indicates a tendency toward monopolization.

With the data, the specific content of the posts evaporates, indeed the statements mutate into interchangeable and at the same time usable material. At the same time, the consumer must be animated to somehow stay on the ball within the 24/7 cycle by producing a lot of data himself, posting and commenting on, liking, exchanging and archiving posted material, so that the surveillance capitalists can easily suck him in permanently as a living data generation machine and exploit him. There is a radical indifference on Facebook regarding the respective meanings and contents of posts, which results in "content being judged, quantified, and evaluated solely by the volume, diversity, and depth of the surplus that accrues" (ibid.: 578), based on the anonymous measures of "clicks, likes, and dwell times – and despite the obvious fact that it (surplus) draws its profoundly different meanings from profoundly different human situations" (ibid.: 438).

In order for content to be communicated as quickly as possible, the content should be as transparent as possible. Therefore, fast communication is even associated with the annihilation of the content. And if good communication, according to Baudrillard, implies the annihilation of its own content, good computing implies the digital transparency of knowledge. Good advertising implies the nullity, or at least the neutralization, of the advertised product, just as fashion implies the transparency of women and their bodies, and just as the exercise of power implies the insignificance of those who exercise it.

The radical indifference of tech capital to the content of posts, seen from the subjective side of users, requires an increase in the organic composition of ignorance (other than love for oneself), which is by no means an individual shortcoming, but a simple consequence of algorithmic governance, and this ignorance is in turn the precondition for tech capital to act so readily a specific speculative capital that transforms uncertainties into risks in the mode of simultaneity and then also constantly updates and evaluates them. The mode of actualization, however, must not be understood here as that of the virtual, as Deleuze demonstrates; rather, it is identical with the momentariness that is now made permanent, so that what matters is what is current in the present and what counts in the media.

This has also shifted the relationship between difference and consolidation/standardization in the media world. In our analyses, we perhaps still adhere too strongly to versity (equalization), an

inversion and mutation of diversity, which, however, does not include the elimination of difference or socio-cultural differentiation; on the contrary, versity uses difference as its real substrate to generate standardized organizational systems. Constantly new systems of order and technologies of power are thus created, which absorb or at least modulate differences. In contrast, in the operationalization of radical indifference, there is no longer any modulation and consolidation of differences; rather, all differences concerning the most diverse contents are considered equivalent, and thus one neutralizes the content or meaning. This kind of rigid formatting goes back to a financialized accumulation regime, whose first claim is no longer progress or development, but which in its short-termism or in every second must promise the successful management of constantly present risk possibilities, no matter to which underlying values the insurances refer. Anything and everything, any event, any content and any meaning can be transformed into a risk. Analogously, the content that materializes on social platforms in images, videos and texts is the tradable raw material that tech capital extracts as data. This is a surplus insofar as data is also extracted that goes far beyond what would actually be necessary as an information service for the user, but nevertheless represents a resource for surveillance capital to capitalize on. Ultimately, all differences (of content) are now considered equivalent, or, to put it differently, every specific meaning dissolves in the data stream, so that a radical indifference prevails. Difference equals indifference, is now the magic formula.

Let's take a look at the look: Baudrillard writes in his book "Transparency of Evil" that everyone is in search of their Look. Since it is no longer possible to establish a claim to one's own existence, there is nothing left but to perform an apparent act without caring about being – or even about being seen. The look does not show that I exist, and therefore I am, but it shows: I am visible, I am an image – look! look! For Baudrillard, this is not even narcissism, but only an ego-exhibition without depth, a kind of self-promoting frugality, in which everyone becomes the manager of his own appearance.

The "look" is a kind of minimal, low-resolution image, like a video image – or what McLuhan would call a tactile image, an image that neither creates fascination – as fashion still does – but only a special effect, with no particular meaning. The look is no longer a function of fashion – it is a form of fashion that has become obsolete. It no longer even appeals to a logic of distinction, it no longer relies on an interplay of differences: The Look plays with difference without believing in it. It is, in fact, an indifference/difference.

Baudrillard writes: "When things, signs, actions are freed from their idea, their essence their value, their reference, their origin and their destiny, they enter into endless self-reproduction. Things continue to function while the idea of them has long since been lost. They function in total indifference to their own content. And the paradox is that they function all the better. Thus the idea of progress has been lost, but progress continues. The idea of wealth, which underlies production, has disappeared but production continues in the most beautiful way….. Also the idea of the political. Has been lost, but the political game goes on in secret indifference to its own stakes." (Baudrillard, 12)

The kind of content-neutralizing equivalence also makes at least the visible, the flowing text at Facebook generally susceptible to all kinds of fake news, which is mostly accepted by the surveillance capitalists, as long as no objections come from politics, because after all, every

content counts for the invisible shadow text or the black box of the algorithms as raw data material, which the "machine intelligence" then operationalizes so that surveillance capital is able to offer pinpoint prediction products to advertisers at the behavioral derivative markets. This kind of extraction and production of data or behavioral surplus requires a project that, far beyond transforming uncertainty into calculable risk, must also necessarily produce certainties, that is, not only anticipate precise forms of user behavior, but actually motivate and steer users toward the behaviors desired by surveillance capital.

Inherent in the post-factual age is the incessant generation and interpretation of data and information (and their meanings), though this by no means means means that meaning itself disappears. The liquefaction of meaning in the endless data mush as a result of the permanent search for patterns and correlations in the produced amounts of data does not mean, as assumed by Baudrillard with his simulation theory, that the signs merely circulate in the as-if, but that the extraction of "meaning in itself" is becoming more and more intensive, precisely because of the fact that it is still necessary to interpret and interpret, regardless of what is now meant in detail. This lies in the last instance in the future-oriented capitalization, which includes both the money and the bits in their exchangeability as well as an increase of capital calculating on the future, solely for the purpose of staging everything and anything as a financial investment or derivative, which, independent of the respective determinacy of an underlying value, to which the derivative refers in each case, is supposed to generate nothing but yield.

With regard to the exchangeability of bits, the computer turns out to be a sign transformer that processes pure information, but not without content, but with arbitrary and exchangeable content. Just as money must be exchangeable for goods, no matter against which, bits must mean something, no matter what they mean. Money and bits index communication precisely under the aspect of the negation of a specific meaning. Or, to put it differently, to the exclusion of any meaning except that which must be incessantly signified, so that thatness and the thwarted perspective of meaning clearly come to the fore here. Therefore, especially with the current data invasion, there is no general loss of meaning, but rather an overproduction of meaning that is complementary to the indifference to any specific meaning set by capital, but it still has to be meant, otherwise the system would fall apart. This kind of overproduction of meaning constitutes the real loss of meaning and of truth. Betancourt summarizes these connections as agnotology. He writes: "The problem of the information-rich society is not one of accessing information – accessing information is becoming an everyday affair due to the constantly activated computer networks – but is a question of coherence. Agnotology operates in the production of decoherence: it undermines the ability to determine what information is truthful and admissible for the construction of interpretations." (211) "Agnotology has the function of eliminating the potential for contradiction." (234) Betancourt suggests "agnotological capitalism" as the correct name for the constitution of this data empire: "a capitalism systematically based on the production and maintenance of ignorance." (233) Thus, ignorance is not so much the result of a lack of information, but on the contrary, the result of the abundance of information.

Thus, today the creative faculty of high-tech paranoia is characterized less by a lack of orienting knowledge than by the overproduction of meaning that results from the game that meaning exists at all. If meanings thus become interchangeable in multiply circulating artificial processes

of interpretation, from which the struggles over interpretations first arise, then a mad search for meaning follows quasi inevitably. While capital can certainly live with this kind of loss of meaning through the overproduction of equivalent meanings, this is not readily possible for the state, because with it the equivalence of all meanings is called into question, if it wants to prove itself to be the standpoint of all standpoints.

One could say with Lacan that the unfiltered data stream is the realm of the real, while information and metadata reflect reality, a world made intelligent by cognitive filters and technological infrastructures, which itself is composed of registers of the imaginary and symbolic. Incessant accumulation of data, information and opinions that react to each other almost hysterically, especially in the social networks, as the same and as different in every moment, in order to generate, above all, delusional aggregates and illusory waste of every kind. One must speak of a tendency here, since Google & Alphabet generate a large part of their turnover with advertising based on the auctioning and leasing of search terms, so that it can be said that although data is the raw material of the digital economy, linguistic meanings do not completely disappear with it, so that a systematic capitalization and monetarization of linguistic meanings can also occur. Even in the financial sector, there is agreement that capital is not exhausted in numbers, charts, and models based primarily on a-significant semiotics, but that companies need to be semantically and narratively spruced up.

While it is true that the value of branded companies in particular cannot be determined independently of their tangible assets, business practices, product portfolio, and measurable and expected future economic success, symbol systems and narratives still play a role in determining stock market value, especially for branded companies. While money as a form of the general equivalent of goods levels their qualitative differences, brands always promise the incomparable and the singular; they use not only markers of difference but differentiated systems of signs and symbols. Here the incommensurable signifying, which knows no equivalent, still possesses meaning itself. The brands have even institutionalized the appropriation of symbolic capital, leaving it up to the individual to decide whether he or she wants to draw on the symbolic worlds and sign repertoire of the brands. Moreover, the algorithmic operationalization of lexical material makes it possible to objectify, quantify, and monetize the value of a word. Term exchanges transfer the mechanisms of price formation to language and its lexical material. Every word, every term has its price, which is determined in a digital auction. And this monetary value, in turn, does not remain without influence on the choice of words and the use of language, whereby outstanding terms and combinations of terms are preferred. Money has taken possession of language, while algorithmic language production simultaneously generates a high degree of communicative liquidity and indifference

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CATEGORIES
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AUTHORS
ALL INPUT

SOCIAL

FACEBOOK
INSTAGRAM
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